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## Senators: Increase mileage standard

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From combined dispatches

Senators called for higher automobile fuel-economy standards yesterday as a top Bush administration official declared an end to the supply disruptions that sent pump prices over \$3 a gallon last month.

U.S. Energy Secretary Samuel W. Bodman said the switch to ethanol as an additive in summer fuels from MTBE is complete, and the supply disruptions related to the change appear to be over. Transportation snafus in delivering the ethanol blend in April had sent prices skyrocketing and caused sporadic outages of fuel in Washington-area gas stations and other East Coast areas.

"To my knowledge, things have settled down and the transportation system is now working pretty smoothly," Mr. Bodman said at an appearance in Alexandria, adding that logistical problems related to shipping have been addressed and he has not heard recently of any shortages affecting filling stations.

"To my knowledge, MTBE has been phased out in its entirety, and we are now operating with total dependence on ethanol." The changeover appears to have been completed without the need for any waivers of clean-fuel regulations by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

President Bush announced with great fanfare two weeks ago that he would provide the waivers if states requested them. Several states, including Maryland and Virginia, requested waivers, but the EPA said earlier this week that it had not acted on any of them.

Meanwhile, on Capitol Hill, the administration came under criticism for not going far enough to increase the fuel efficiency of vehicles in regulations last month requiring a 1.8 miles per gallon boost in the average mileage of sports utility vehicles and other light trucks over the next four years.

At a hearing of the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee, Sen. Barbara Boxer, California Democrat, called such an increase "abysmal" in view of the technological advances available to automakers.

"Everyone knows the technology is so far ahead of you," she told Transportation Secretary Norman Y. Mineta, noting that some manufacturers are making pickups that get 38 mpg. "You are so far behind what's even happening in the marketplace."

Sen. Olympia J. Snowe, Maine Republican, said a National Academy of Sciences study in 2001 concluded substantial mileage increases could be made using today's technology.

"What is the resistance, your reluctance?" Mrs. Snowe asked. She said she plans to press for legislation requiring a 10 mpg fuel-economy increase for passenger vehicles.

Mr. Mineta repeated the administration's opposition to imposing tougher Corporate Average Fuel Economy requirements on cars until the rules are changed to make them more flexible for industry.

"The president and I are committed to improving fuel economy across the board through an open regulatory process built upon sound science and economics, but we will

not accept an arbitrary statutory increase" that does not take into account the financial condition of manufacturers, jobs that could be lost and other factors, he said.

Currently, automakers must meet a fleet average for passenger cars of 27.5 miles per gallon, a standard that has not been raised since 1975. The new standard for SUVs is 24 mpg.

The 27.5 mpg standard "was not, and certainly is not now based on sound science or economics," Mr. Mineta said.

President Bush has asked Congress to allow the Transportation Department to revamp the program so it can impose a sliding-scale requirement taking into account different vehicle sizes -- the approach taken in the recent SUV rules.

In any case, he said an increase in mileage standards would not have any impact on gas prices today, as developing new rules would take at least a year and then cannot be imposed for 18 months to give manufacturers adequate lead time.